

**SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF EL DORADO**

ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

1. Description of Need

El Dorado County is located just West of Stateline, Nevada, and continues westward to the Sacramento County Line. El Dorado County covers some 1805 square miles, and the population is approximately 157,000 according to the 2000 Census.

Our County is unique in that there are two separate and distinct judicial areas, one covering the mountainous Sierra Nevada region at South Lake Tahoe, and the other covering the Western Slope at Placerville.

Placerville is the County seat. There are approximately 47,063 residents in the Placerville, El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park and Diamond Springs area, with South Lake Tahoe having approximately 23,609 residents. The balance of the population lives in rural areas.

Our Ethnic Diversity is approximately 87% white, 9% Hispanic, and the balance American Indian, Black and Asian.

In April of 2001 a committee was formed to determine the problems and solutions necessary to assist the self represented litigants. Included in this committee was the court, private attorneys, the Family Law Facilitator and representative from the Department of Child Support Services.

Specific needs of the self-represented litigants were discussed, and generally there are several areas of concern, including the lack of legal information available to the self-represented litigant, along with limited resources and limited legal assistance.

Presently, we have only the AB-1058 Family Law Facilitator available to help self-represented litigants with child support matters, the Women's Center in both Placerville and South Lake Tahoe to help with Domestic Violence issues, and very limited assistance from Legal Services of Northern California through the Mother Lode Pro Per Assistance Project.

Generally, self-represented litigants cannot afford legal counsel and have little or no background enabling them to prepare paperwork, understand legal procedures, or research the law. Self-represented litigants generally are unable to adequately present their case to the court in written pleadings, nor orally during court proceedings.

2. Program Areas

The Self-Represented Litigants Committee has identified several goals for this project, including the following:

- Educating self-represented litigants

- Expansion of services available to self-represented litigants
- Expansion of the Family Law Facilitators duties to include one day per week at Placerville and South Lake Tahoe to help self-represented litigants with non AB 1058 matters.
- Continuing of the Street Law Program, a program designed to help self-represented litigants understand particular areas of the law. This program was set up through the court and is handled by private attorneys giving free seminars at the courthouse to the public.

Educating Self-Represented Litigants

We are recommending the purchase of two workstations, including computers, monitors and printers at Placerville and two stations at South Lake Tahoe.

These stations will be available for the use of self-represented litigants, and will include the California Courts Self-Help Center web site, DissoMaster software to determine child support, Attorney's Briefcase software in the areas of Family and Juvenile Law and other software regarding specific areas of the law, including all legal forms.

We intend to continue to offer our Street Law Program to all who wish to attend. Currently, we invite private and government attorneys to speak on specific areas of the law in seminars given at the courthouse after regular hours. Each seminar is opened to the general public for questions and answers in an attempt to educate the public with regard to legal procedures. Videotapes of sessions are available for checkout at our main public library in Placerville and will soon be available at South Lake Tahoe. We further intend to provide self-help publications at our self help centers, along with video programs that we currently possess.

Expansion of Services to Self-Represented Litigants

As previously mentioned, we are hoping to be able to purchase four workstations, two at each major court location, to assist self-represented litigants. Our goal is to be able to hire our part time family law facilitators for one day at each location so the self-represented litigants will be able to ask questions and get advice regarding non AB 1058 issues that they do not understand. We feel that by only providing computers and instructions, only half of the job will be done. It is important that a "live body" be at the courtroom at least one day per week to help answer questions on an as needed basis.

Expansion of the duties of the Family Law Facilitator

Currently, our family law facilitators are part time and only handle AB-1058 work. By law, they cannot provide any assistance other than child support. By expanding the family law facilitator's duty, they will be able to help all self-represented family law litigants with all aspects of the family law case. Additionally, they will be available to help litigant with other questions, forms and procedures such as unlawful detainer and other civil cases.

Criminal Law will continue to be under the Public Defender's Office and

through court appointed private counsel. Juvenile dependency and delinquency cases are handled by court appointed counsel and the Public Defender's Office; therefore, these two areas will not be under the duties performed by the facilitator.

We are hoping to obtain funding to allow each facilitator, one in Placerville and one at South Lake Tahoe, to work one extra day per week. If the family law facilitators are not available for this task, it is recommended that an attorney be hired as an independent contractor to contract for this service one day per week.

Expansion of the duties of the Family Law Mediator at South Lake Tahoe

South Lake Tahoe has a large Latino population. Currently we have a part time mediator that is bi-lingual. Our plan would be to use the mediator to assist as a translator to help the Latino population at the self-help terminals and to translate between the Facilitator and client.

3. Program Action Plan

a) Obtain funding to purchase four terminals as follows:

- 1) Computer Work Stations & Chairs \$1,902.55
- 2) Dell Computers (4) \$5,172.00
- 3) HP Laserjet 1200 printers (4) \$1,724.00
- 4) Toner (one year supply) \$170.00
- 5) Paper (one year supply) \$250.00
- 6) ISD support to wire work stations \$3,000.00
- 7) DissoMaster Software \$621.69
- 9) Attorney's Briefcase Software \$1,883.00

Total Initial Outlay \$14,723.24

b) Family Law Facilitator extension agreement
(2) facilitators, (8) hours per week at each location @ \$40.00 per hour.
\$33,280.00 per year

c) Yearly Maintenance Costs of terminals and software
\$2500.00

d) Use of Mediator to translate for Latino Clients -
(8) hours per week @ \$40.00 per hour (includes benefits). Yearly total approx. \$16,640.00.

4. Existing Resources

Court Staff, Bar Association, Facilitator, Mediator

5. Additional Resources Needed

Funding, maintenance costs, computers, monitors, printers, software, furniture, funding for staff attorney, and location for terminals.

6. Evaluation

We believe this program will be a major success in El Dorado County.

Self-Represented Litigants constantly ask about existing resources to help them with their legal issues, only to find out that our County does not have the resources to provide them with advice, computer access and translation services. This program, after the initial outlay of \$14,723.24 will cost in the neighborhood of \$52,420.00 per year.